

11/13/80

4. IRAN: KHOMEINI'S BALANCING ACT

Ayatollah Khomeini has consistently thwarted the efforts of any faction to achieve a dominant position. His apparent insistence that Ghotbzadeh be released indicates that Khomeini is determined to insure a political balance, even if that means contradicting an "official" government act. A groundswell of support for Ghotbzadeh may also have influenced Khomeini's decision. Ghotbzadeh's "ordeal" provides a scenario by which he can reenter the political fray under the "shield of the Imam."

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After his arrest, Ghotbzadeh received support from a variety of political groupings: Majlis moderates; Khomeini family members; assorted clerics; the Bani-Sadr circle, and bazaar merchants in Qom and Tehran.

If the hardliners had kept Ghotbzadeh locked up, the ground would have been prepared for an assault on the moderates, including Bani-Sadr. Khomeini's intervention indicates that he is still unwilling to allow the hardliners to triumph.

Khomeini's action, however, should not be viewed as a "tilt" toward the moderates. On the contrary, his continuing preference for a "balance" was apparent on November 11 when he met separately with Ghotbzadeh and the head of the propaganda office of the Supreme Defense Council who was associated with the arrest decision.

Several inferences can be drawn from the Ghotbzadeh affair:

--Khomeini remains the key decision maker.

--A moderate alliance--composed of portions of the bazaar and Majlis, Ghotbzadeh and Bani-Sadr, and military figures and moderate clergymen--may emerge.

--To recover the initiative, the hardliners may rekindle criticism of Bani-Sadr's conduct of the war, particularly if they sense growing military influence.

--The hardliners may also demand--and this inference is highly speculative--complete US acceptance of the Majlis hostage terms to deprive the moderates of a "victory."

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State Department review completed